

What can a sixty-five page book on the first eleven chapters of Genesis tell the enquiring mind that von Rad or Vawter have not already said in much greater detail? If the reader is looking for the semantic word games or the scrupulously argued stances favoured by many Old Testament scholars, then the answer is nothing. But the precise value of this little book lies in its concise yet scholarly style. Dr Phillips' last book, *God B.C.*, presented in condensed and readily accessible form ideas the Israelites entertained about the nature of God and his activity in the world. This latest book has all the advantages of the previous one and can, in some ways, be considered its sequel.

In *Lower than the Angels* the author demonstrates that the several writers of Genesis were concerned to show "... the nature of God, the nature of man, and the nature of the relationship between them – none of which alters, no matter how different one's personal circumstances are" (p 62). It is a measure of Anthony Phillips' success that he is able, in the final chapter, to show very convincingly that what the Yahwist and the Priestly Author had to say to their contemporaries is just as relevant to mankind today.

Mention of the New Testament is normally taboo for Old Testament exegetes but at all points in the present work the ideas set forth are constantly related to the New Testament and the Christian reader. This daring approach by Dr Phillips skilfully avoids the trap into which the majority of Christian Old Testament popularisers have fallen, that of seeing the Old Testament as prefiguring and finding its value only in the New. Indeed, the author is so relaxed in his relating of the two testaments that one eventually has to ask what the New Testament has to offer that is not already there in the Old.

The basic thesis of the book is that Genesis 1 - 11 demonstrates how man was created in God's image, which accounts for his unease in belonging to the finite world. His tragedy is that he cannot help but aspire constantly to a divinity like that

of the elohim, yet be unable to achieve it. Hubris is the all-pervading sin and the story of man's relationship to his creator is one of constant disobedience deserving of punishment, yet of God's amelioration of that punishment and of his gracious offering of another chance. The point of contact with the New Testament is that as man forfeits paradise by grasping at what was not his by nature, he can regain it only by "voluntary abandonment of his security in faith, by self-abhiliation" (p 64). Abraham leaving all he knew to go into a foreign land is the prime Old Testament instance of this. Jesus Christ is, of course, the New Testament paradigm. Interestingly, Anthony Phillips suggests that the coming of the kingdom Jesus speaks of in the gospels is the regaining of the paradise lost in Genesis.

One great advantage of the book lies in the fact that the reader is constantly reminded that the text of Genesis must be read on several different levels simultaneously if its theology is to be understood. There is the original theology of the Yahwist, the redaction and additions of the Priestly Author, but also the historical perspective one must constantly have at the back of one's mind when reading a work like Genesis. We are left in no doubt that the books of the Pentateuch are primary sources for the time *when* they were written and not for the time *about which* they were written. This kind of historical double-think is somewhat new to the man-in-the-pew and takes a little getting used to. Dr Phillips is right to insist upon it because it presents important principles which must also be applied to the reading of the New Testament. This method of demythologisation is assisted by the use of archaeological evidence to fix the scene firmly in history. We read about Canaanite new year festivals (p 47), that Phillistia existed throughout the united monarchy even though that monarchy claimed possession of the whole area at that time. With regard to the flood we are told that, "... no evidence of a universal flood has ever been produced. Nor is it likely to be" (p 39). This matter-of-fact

approach to anti-fundamentalist ideas can do nothing but good.

Inevitably in such a short book there are some topics that are not treated in sufficient depth. The vexed question of whether the idea of covenant is actually present in the Old Testament to the extent that scholars have generally thought is a case in point. But on the whole the lack of discussion on many similar questions is a merciful omission. Many people have been put off Old Testament studies simply because they found it a morass of such argument. Anthony Phillips, using his consider-

able knowledge and experience, has done most of this tedious groundwork so the beginner in biblical studies, at whom this book is primarily directed, can get off with a head start. The book will also be of value to the established student, as the salient theological points are presented in an economical yet unskimped form. One hopes that Anthony Phillips will one day write a full-scale commentary on Genesis. Meanwhile, this is a more than adequate substitute.

TONY AXE O P

**TRINITY AND TEMPORALITY**, by John J O'Donnell S J. Oxford University Press, 1983. pp xi + 215. £15.00.

Atheists have long lamented the lack of a credible theodicy. Some modern theologians have tried to fill the gap by thinking of God as developing or changing. This is, somehow, supposed to make God more acceptable. According to writers like Jürgen Moltmann it is also a faithful response to the revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

Fr O'Donnell's book is a study of this line of argument, though O'Donnell is particularly concerned with its significance for the theology of the Trinity, for it may be, he says, that 'a deeper penetration into the mystery of the triune God will enable us to rethink our philosophical categories' (p 32). The conclusion then is that 'The Christian God is not the absolute, impassible God of classical philosophical theism . . . The Christian God is the God who suffers in time, who enters our history in the event of Jesus Christ' (p 200).

As an account of one strand in contemporary theology, the book is a useful one. It will serve as a helpful introduction to writers like Charles Hartshorne, Schubert Ogden, and Moltmann. But the philosophical issues touched on are treated very naively. The real problem lies in the treatment of impassibility. Thus, for example, the familiar point is made that an immutable God cannot create a contingent world; but nothing is said about the equally familiar reply that the world's contingency does not entail that God creates of neces-

sity since the contingency of the world is a fact about it, not about God. Why cannot the eternal unchanging God create a world whose nature is such that it might not exist? O'Donnell does not deal with this question. Nor does he deal with familiar replies to arguments like the one which says that God must be changeable if he is loving. Here, it seems to me, O'Donnell has sold out to those anthropomorphic theologies for which the nature of love in human beings provides the rules governing what love must be in its divine form. According to such theologies, with which O'Donnell is sympathetic, God, *qua* immutable, is 'indifferent', 'unaffected', 'lifeless' and so on. But the dangers of anthropomorphic theology have been noted time and again, and it has been vigorously denied that the more classical tradition to which it is a reaction has the undesirable entailments claimed for it or that it has undesirable entailments.

My point, then, is that O'Donnell has not provided a rigorous philosophy of God. And this leaves me questioning the true value of the authors it is most concerned to champion. One need not doubt that Revelation takes us far beyond what philosophy can discover; but it will not contradict what we know of God independently of Revelation. *Trinity and Temporality* would have been a better book if it had dealt more thoroughly with this.

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